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Presentation Skills: An Assessment of University and Career-Related Presentations

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Effective communication is heralded as a necessary skill for students entering the marketplace in the 21st century. Indeed, many graduates identify effective communication as the most useful skill they will need in the marketplace (Emmanuel, 2005; Zekeri, 2004). Similarly, employers identify interpersonal and presentation skills as highly important for new employees (Planning Job Choices, 2002), as do most universities. Given the importance of presentation skills to these multiple constituencies, many questions still exist that require further research. For example, what kinds of and how much presentation skills training are students receiving in the university setting?

There are numerous ways in which universities enhance students' oral communication skills. The most predominant is a course-based competency, otherwise known as the basic course requirement (Wolvin, 1998; Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999; Cutspec, McPherson, & Spiro, 1999). The *basic course* is often required of first year students and provides introductory skills in public speaking and/or interpersonal communication (Cutspec et al., 1999). This course lays the foundation for further communication training. That is, stu-

dents learn the "basics" of communication in this course. The assumption is that no single introductory course is able to adequately address all students' oral communication skills needs and competencies (Porrovecchio, 2005; Yoder, 1999). Therefore, students are to receive additional training in their oral communication skills throughout their time at the university and more particularly in courses in their discipline.

Morreale et al.'s (1999) national survey of the basic course shows that most courses are public speaking (55%) whereas the only other sizeable format (30%) is a hybrid (interpersonal, small group, and interpersonal skills) course. Therefore, when universities promote oral communication skills, they primarily teach public speaking. The public speaking course focuses mostly on informative and persuasive speaking, along with the "legwork" (audience analysis, delivery, listening, outlining, and supporting materials, among other topics) needed to do so. The topics students encounter did not change much between 1990-1996 (Morreale et al., 1999). The only major addition to the course has been the inclusion of technology. Whereas most public speaking courses include skills and theory assessment in the course, there is little assessment conducted outside the course and further on in the students' time at the university.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

The focus of this article is limited to presentational skills, as opposed to interpersonal skills. Since these are two very different sets of communication skills encom-

passed under the umbrella of oral communication, the term *presentation skills* will be utilized to more clearly distinguish the focus of this paper. Presentations and presentation skill training are more likely to be identified in syllabi and instructional materials than interpersonal skills because presentations are more discrete and need to be scheduled. In contrast, interpersonal communication skills are utilized in every class interaction and are more varied and elusive than presentations skills. We are not claiming that presentation skills are more important than interpersonal skills; simply that this investigation is limited to presentation skills in order to keep the inquiry manageable. Similarly, Morreale et al., (1999) found that public speaking (and therefore presentation skills) is the most common format of the basic course.

At one mid-sized Midwestern University, enrollment data in the courses that satisfy the oral communication component of general education indicate most students (about 2100 students per year) take an interpersonal communication course to meet this requirement. Students gain skills for interacting with family, friends, and romantic partners. A much smaller, but sizeable group of students (about 650 students per year) elect to take public speaking to satisfy their oral communication requirement. This enrollment pattern may hold true for any university that provides students with an option of courses for meeting their oral communication requirement. In contrast, for those universities that require a public speaking course, all students will have at least basic training in presentation skills (Morreale et al., 1999).

Regardless of whether students take a public speaking or interpersonal course, if presentation skills are valued across the curriculum, we expect to uncover several classes within each major that emphasize or assign them. Given that this university, and most universities, do not have formalized "speaking across the curriculum" programs (Morreale et al., 1999), it is important to look at courses within students' program of study to assess whether presentation skills are refined and practiced in their major and minor and other general education courses. Therefore, looking at the "bigger picture" and assessing the different presentation opportunities across students' programs of study may allow us to see different kinds of patterns and trends for presentation skill training that transcend any individual course, faculty, or department.

Therefore, the following research questions are advanced:

RQ 1: How many presentations do students typically encounter across the curriculum?

RQ 2: What types of presentations are students encountering across the curriculum?

METHOD- STUDY ONE

Portfolios and Presentations

Sixty student portfolios were randomly selected from a library of 119 student portfolios maintained by the assessment office through the Office of the Provost. The

assessment office recruits students to participate by offering them university logo-wear (sweatshirts, sweatpants, caps) in exchange for a copy of their syllabi, graded assignments, papers, exams, and all other course materials[i]. Of these 60 portfolios, 55 of them were senior portfolios and therefore included in the analyses.

Syllabi were the primary means of identifying presentation assignments. The portfolios contained a total of 1360 courses. However, there were times when the syllabi did not explicitly indicate a presentation, but within the materials in the portfolio, faculty comments and grades were found written on the bottom or on the back of the last page of a paper (that graded a presentation of it to the class). Therefore, all materials in the portfolios were reviewed to find evidence of presentations.

Coding System

The authors worked together to develop a system to document the frequency and types of presentations required across the university. The portfolios were first reviewed for the total number of syllabi in each portfolio (indicating the number of courses a student took while at the university). Then, for each course with a presentation, the department, course level, number of presentations in that course, percent grade for each presentation, and type of presentation were each documented. Then, each presentation was coded for: length (in min-

[i]The completed portfolio contained all years the student spent at the university. The portfolio included the syllabi from all of their classes, all graded materials from the course (papers, exams, lab reports, etc), a study log from a typical week during the semester, as well as reflections on their entire university experience.

utes), individual or group presentation, and whether there were mandatory requirements for the presentation (such as a poster, PowerPoint, overhead, handout, outline, or a paper or report that had to be submitted in conjunction with the presentation). We also recorded whether a grading rubric was utilized and the specificity of that rubric (high, medium, low). Lastly, the total number of courses in the portfolio was documented in order to determine the percent of courses per student that included presentation assignments.

Most of the presentation criteria were simply documented from the syllabi. However, there were a few variables that we did have to code: presentation type and rubric.

Presentation type. The type of presentation was documented as informative, persuasive, narrative, debate, position/argument, artistic (readings/poetry), interview, problem-solution, special occasion, or unknown. Informative presentations were those where students primarily presented factual information without any explicit goal to persuade the audience. Persuasive presentations were defined as those that explicitly indicated that the speaker was trying to influence the audience's opinions through the presentation. Narrative presentations included those whereby students were asked to share personal story from their life (once again, without explicit intent to persuade). Debates were defined as presentations where two different speakers took opposing viewpoints on a specific topic and presented one after the other. Artistic presentations included all kinds of poetry and interpretive reading presentations.

Rubrics. Rubrics were extremely diverse and therefore difficult to code. Three main categories were cre-

ated in order to deal with the diversity: low, medium, and high detail. Low detail rubrics included between 1 to 3 criteria, medium detail rubrics included 4 to 6 criteria, and high detail rubrics included 7 or more criteria.

Coding Procedures

The two authors served as the coders for the study. The authors discussed the categories and trained together on 22 presentations included in three portfolios (not included in the analysis) to check inter-rater reliability. At that time, coder agreement was 91%. Such a high reliability was achieved because most of the information was clearly identified in the materials in the portfolio. At the end of the study, the coders chose an additional four portfolios not used in the study to code to determine if their coding was still in alignment. Based on the coding of eighteen presentations in those four portfolios, the inter-rater agreement at the end of the study was 90%, indicating that the coders continued to be reliable even at the end of the coding process.

In order to include as many portfolios as possible in the study, the coders assessed different portfolios. That is, each person reviewed 30 portfolios, for a total of 60 portfolios between the two coders. The high inter-rater reliability at the onset and the end of the study justifies splitting up the coding to include more data in the analysis. Previous published studies by Dail and Way (1985), Skill and Robinson (1994), Skill and Wallace (1990) and more recently by Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman, and Lund (2003) have utilized a similar coding protocol, whereby reliability is achieved and then the data set is split between the coders.

After all data was documented from the portfolios, the total number of courses each student took that had at least one presentation, and the total number of required presentations for each student were calculated. For example, one student had 8 courses that required presentations, but a couple courses required more than one presentation, therefore this student was required to give 11 presentations.

RESULTS

Research question one explored the number of presentations students are required to give during their time at university. The portfolios revealed that the 55 seniors included in the study completed about one oral presentation per year. On average, most courses (85%) did not include a single presentation. Of those that did (15%), only one presentation was assigned. The data reveal that the majority of the presentations were required by only a small number of departments (rather than equally distributed across all departments). The Business school, which has worked with the Speech Center for training and evaluating their students, required a presentation in many of their classes. Additionally, Education majors also were required to conduct presentations as part of their course requirements. Two hundred thirty-three presentations were found in non-speech courses across the curriculum for the 55 senior portfolios.

Research question two explored the nature of presentations students encounter across the curriculum. The following are the type (and corresponding percent) of the

nature of the 233 presentations: informative (71%), persuasive (1%), narrative (none), debate (2%), position/argument (7%), artistic readings/poetry (.5%). Seventeen percent of the presentations were not clearly marked as to what kind they were, and therefore are "unknown." Therefore, the most common type of presentation at the university is an informative presentation. Additionally, 36% of the informative presentations required were students presenting their term papers to the class.

How much were these presentations worth? Seventeen percent were five or less percent of their total grade, 30% of the presentations were 6-10 percent of the grade, 18% of presentations accounted for 11-15 percent of the course grade, 20% of the presentations accounted for 16-20 percent of the course grade, and the remaining 14% accounted for 21% to 30% of the course grade.

Another notable feature of the required presentations was that 57% of presentations were conducted in groups, whereas only 32% required individual presentations (the remaining % is unknown). When one considers the number of students in a class and the available class time, the necessity of group presentations becomes clear. Group presentations become an even more viable option when one considers the length of the presentation requirement—the average length of a group presentation was 20 minutes. On the other hand, individual presentations tended to be approximately nine minutes in length.

The types of required "accessories" to presentations were also documented. PowerPoint was the most common requirement for a presentation (11%). Yet, very few

courses required posters (3%), overheads (3%), handouts (2%), or outlines (5%) with their presentations.

Eleven percent of the presentations were graded with a rubric. These rubrics varied widely, from only a couple of main criteria on them, to highly systematic, detailed criteria. In addition, presentations contributed very little points to the students overall grade; 47% of the courses assigned less than 10% of the course grade to the presentation, whereas 38 % of courses assigned 11-20% of the points to the course grade.

STUDY ONE DISCUSSION

Based on this study, we conclude that there are only a limited number of required course-based presentation opportunities at the university. On average, students encounter about one presentation per year across the curriculum. Most presentations were informative in nature, which parallels real-life experiences students will require in many contexts. Additionally, most of these were group presentations. Given that many corporations utilize work "teams," the assignments may reflect the trend in business. The 10-20 minute length of the required speeches also appears reasonable. In the work or civic world, the length of these speeches appear neither too long nor too short when compared to real life presentational experiences.

Individual programs may want to assess their students' presentation skill abilities during their last semester at the university. Are graduating students competent speakers? Do students feel prepared for giving presentations in the workforce?

One interesting finding is that no time was allotted in the course schedule of classes (of non speech courses) for instructors to train their students in presentation skills. Only one course had one day of lecture, from a guest speaker from a speech center, to come into class and educate students on how to execute the required presentation. It appears that faculty are not dedicating class time to teaching this valued skill, and that perhaps the students are expected to know how to present or are expected to learn on their own. Perhaps faculty in other departments assume that the basic course teaches students how to give effective speeches, and therefore they do not need to provide follow-up training. Additional research may be conducted at universities to assess faculty perceptions of students' presentation skills, and whether the faculty believe that it is their responsibility to promote student presentation skills.

There are negligible formal "speaking across the curriculum" programs at universities across the nation (Morreale et al., 1999), and yet, the basic course is often the only training students receive. As the enrollment data at this university reveal, most students do not take a public speaking course during their time at the university. If they opt for the interpersonal course, students can graduate without any *formal* training in presentation skills. Therefore, students may be woefully prepared to deliver professional quality presentations in their chosen career.

Study One Limitations

This study was designed to assess the frequency and nature of presentations students are encountering

across the curriculum. The portfolios were one way to assess that data. However, some of the specific information related to the nature of the presentations was not reflected in the materials. That is, some courses did not specify how long the speech was required to be. We surmise that some of the information about the nature of these presentations was provided orally to the students in class, rather than in written form. Therefore, some of the data was not complete.

Basic Course Implications

Students who take public speaking courses have the foundation for individual presentation skills necessary to complete their part of subsequent course presentations that are common across the university. Unfortunately, in this university, most students elect the interpersonal course and therefore receive little or no presentation training, leaving the bulk of the instruction to professors who may or may not have any training or preparation for teaching presentation skills to their students. Students who are particularly reticent or fearful of presenting in public, those students most in need of the course, may avoid presentation skills courses and training the most.

In order to more effectively train students in presentation skills, Western Carolina University pretests and advises students into one of five branches (courses) according to needs and abilities (Cutspec et al., 1999). The branches (courses) represent different starting points and goals for students. For example, the first branch is "honors sections" for students who already have good communication skills. The second branch is designed to

help students with high levels of communication apprehension. The third branch is for those students who need a skills intensive course, but who are not apprehensive. The fourth branch is the "general" course and the fifth branch is for students who have successfully completed the course, but who have been identified by two different course faculty as needing additional work on their public speaking skills. This fifth branch helps students to revisit the curriculum and to refine their skills.

The placement/assessment process is a relatively extensive one. Students are assessed with communication apprehension and willingness to communicate scales. Students also self-report their prior experience with public speaking courses. Additionally, parents and trained observers provide input for placement into one of the five branches. Although students are advised into one of the branches, it is ultimately the students' choice which branch (course) they will take.

Future Research

Program effectiveness studies for Western Carolina's branch placement would be useful for basic course directors and for the university. Do universities with more specialized basic courses produce more effective public speakers than universities that implement just one basic course for all students, regardless of ability?

Similarly, student presentation skill assessment data (as they leave the university) would be valuable information. Do students graduate with acceptable presentation skills regardless of whether they opt out of a public speaking course? Are the faculty in the stu-

dents' major departments helping students to communicate more effectively in the major program—effectively utilizing those few presentation opportunities? Are non-speech faculty well trained in presentations skills, perhaps enabling them to effectively teach their students how to give effective presentations?

STUDY TWO

A second study was conducted in order to assess whether the basic course is providing the right foundation for other disciplines, and explore whether "working world" presentations given by graduates in post-graduation jobs match the presentations that students encounter at the university. Given that students encounter most of their presentations in their major classes, this second study examines the level of training faculty have received in presentation skills themselves, how prepared faculty feel they are to teach students how to effectively present their ideas, and identify areas where faculty need training support.

RQ 1: What type of presentations will be given by graduates in their post-graduation jobs?

RQ 2: How important do faculty think presentation skills are for their students once they are in their career-related jobs?

RQ 3: What forms of training have faculty received in presentations skills?

RQ 4: How proficient do faculty feel in providing presentation training to their students?

RQ 5: On what presentation topics do faculty want to receive training?

METHOD- STUDY TWO

Participants

One hundred and eleven faculty at the university completed an on-line survey (resulting in a 20% completion rate). The respondents were from *all* units in the university and adequately reflect the university; the Dental School was the only unit highly underrepresented in the sample[ii]. The faculty who responded were diverse in their number of years teaching as well (at any university as a faculty member): 16% less than 5 years, 33% from 5-10 years, 24% from 10.1-15 years, 11% from 15-20 years, and 16% who have taught for 20 or more years.

Procedures

All faculty at the university were emailed through the faculty list-serve a message that stated,

> "I am interested in getting your feedback on the kinds of presentations your students give in their future

[ii]The sample reasonably reflects the percentages of faculty across the university by school/college. The following numbers report the school, sample, and population percentages respectively: Education: 18, 15; Nursing: 10, 6; Engineering: 9, 14; Dental: 1, 6; Business: 13, 9; and College of Arts and Sciences: 44, 51.

> jobs (after they graduate) and the training you might want in order to help them succeed. Would you be willing to help me out by completing the linked survey—it should take you only 3 minutes."

The link to the survey was provided such that all they had to do was click on the link to take them to the survey. The first page of the survey included an "informed consent" section that respondents read through before they reached the actual survey. In order to gain a higher completion rate, the survey was intentionally only twelve items in length, so that it would take only 3 minutes to complete.

Measures

Nature of Presentations. Two items were asked in order to assess the kinds of presentations students typically give in their career-related jobs. The first item asked faculty to report whether the presentations they would give in their profession were done individually, in pairs, or in groups. If the faculty selected "groups" then they were asked to provide the number of people who make up a typical presenter group. Faculty could select more than one item on the list as long as they thought the type of presentation was common. Therefore, results for this item will add up to more than 100 percent.

The second item asked "What is the nature of the presentations that are most common in the jobs your graduated students hold?" Faculty could select more than one item on the list as long as they thought the type of presentation was common. Therefore, results for this item will add up to more than 100 percent. Response options included "informative," "persuasive,"

"debate/argumentative," "introduction speeches," praise/ celebration/award speeches," or "other."

Importance of Presentation Skills. One item assessed faculty's perception of the importance of presentation skills for their graduates in their jobs. This item was "How important are presentations skills to graduated students' job life," measured on a 4-point scale, "not at all," "minimally important," "somewhat important," and "very important."

Faculty Presentation Skills Training. Two items were utilized to assess faculty presentation skills training. The first item was a multi-part question that assessed the kinds of training faculty have received in presentation skills. Faculty indicated whether they "took a presentation skills course in college," "took a presentations skills course in high school," "took a 2-3 hour seminar in how to give a good presentation," "went to a conference session that focused on presentation skills," or if they had "no formal training or courses in how to give effective presentations."

The second item asked faculty to provide their overall opinion of how they learned to give effective presentations. The response choices were "I learned to give presentations on my own," "I had a mentor/colleague who helped me with presentation skills," or "other (name)."

Faculty Presentation Skill Level. Two items were utilized to capture faculty skill level and adequacy to teach presentation skills. One 4-point item was used to assess faculty's perception of their own presentation skill level, from poor to excellent. Another item assessed if faculty felt they were adequately prepared to teach

their students how to give effective presentations. Respondents indicated either "yes" or "no" for this item.

Desired Faculty Training. One multi-part item asked the faculty to indicate the topics of presentations skills training that would be helpful to them in teaching their students. Faculty could select as many topics as they wanted. This item included a "none" answer as well as 22 different topics for training. Topics ranged from delivery issues (fluency, confidence) to resources (video clips, finding plagiarized speeches) to foundational aspects (main points, outlines, introductions and conclusions, etc). Lastly, after respondents selected the topics they would find helpful, they were asked the likelihood of attending a training session, held for their department. Response choices included: "not likely," "maybe (undecided)," "probably," and "definitely."

STUDY TWO RESULTS

Research Question 1 asked what types of presentations are common in post-graduation jobs in different disciplines. Note that the percentages add up to more than 100% because more than one *common* types of presentations could be selected by each participant. Therefore, the results indicate the percent of faculty who selected the item as "common" in their field. Frequencies indicate that *informative* presentations (92%) are the most common type of presentation in the workplace. *Persuasive* presentations (42%) are also common in career-related jobs, according to faculty. The presentations are primarily individual presentations (71%)

with a sizeable number (50%) indicating small group presentations (2-7 person member teams) as typical.

Research Question 2 asked faculty to indicate how important presentation skills are for their graduates. Results indicated that presentation skills were very important (59%) or somewhat important (35%), with only a few indicating they are minimally important (5%). No faculty member thought that presentations skills were not at all important for their graduates.

Research Question 3 asked what forms of training faculty have received in presentation skills. Faculty indicated that 33% received little to no formal training, whereas 40% took at public speaking course when they were in college, and 5% taking a public speaking class in high school. Otherwise, 15% took a seminar or attended a conference session on how to give effective presentations. Overall, the data are clear: the faculty have not received substantial training in how to give presentations or how to train their students to do so.

Research Question 4 explored how proficient faculty feel in regard to their own presentation skills. An interesting finding emerges here. Most faculty felt they were better than average (63%) or excellent presenters (23%). No faculty member thought he/she was a poor speaker, and only 14% felt they were "adequate" presenters. Consistent with these findings, 72% of faculty felt they were adequately prepared to teach their students how to give effective presentations while only 27% felt they were not well prepared to do so (1% left this item blank).

Research Question 5 asked which kinds of training topics faculty would find helpful. Analyses are broken down by groups of topics that were selected as helpful. The most commonly selected topics were those with 40%

or more respondents selecting them as helpful. Results indicated that training on grading rubrics, effective visual aids, creating memorable speeches, powerful/ effective language, fluency, general nonverbal behavior (eye contact, gestures), dynamic delivery, and confidence would be helpful. It appears faculty feel confident helping their students with the content of the presentations, but need more help with the nonverbal aspects—those aspects more germane to communication departments.

The next "set" of helpful training topics (from 30-39% of respondents indicating they would find them helpful) were guidelines for speaking while using PowerPoint and transitions between main points.

As a follow up to research question 6, we asked faculty to report their likelihood of attending a presentation skills training session *held in their department* if it were on one of their selected topics. Forty-five percent of faculty indicated they would probably or definitely attend. Another 41% indicated that they *might* attend. Although the 45% estimate of attendance is probably inflated from actual attendance, it does suggest that many faculty are interested in learning how to help their students improve their presentation skills.

STUDY TWO DISCUSSION

Study two shows that communication scholars are not the only ones who value presentation skills. Most faculty from across the university indicated that presentation skills are very important, and almost all of the rest of the faculty thought these skills were somewhat

important to their student's success in the workplace. This overwhelming support for the value of presentations skills on behalf of the faculty parallel university goals for effective communication skills for college graduates.

Yet, there is a gap between perceived importance of presentation skills and the level of training faculty receive in them. This study revealed that presentation skills training for faculty is lacking. This is not surprising, in that many faculty have not been trained how to teach courses as well—many university faculty are trained to be researchers, not teachers or speakers.

Speech Communication centers and faculty can help improve students' communication through many means. The basic course and many speech centers are already up and running across the nation. However, this study reveals that there is more that can be done. First, Communication faculty and/or Speech Centers should be encouraged to offer training to Faculty across disciplines in order to help enable them to more effectively educate and provide feedback to their students. Training faculty via multiple training modules may be the most cost efficient way of reaching all students across the university. As more faculty get "on board" the less time and effort is spent each year with them; faculty can then assist other faculty in their own departments. This is one way to improve students' speaking skills across the curriculum without requiring more courses or a mass influx of students into Speech Centers.

On a positive note, the basic course does train students in the two most common types of presentation skills (informative and persuasive) that students are likely to encounter on the job. However, training in the

basic course tends to be for individual presentations rather than group presentations. Given that faculty indicated that individual presentations are more common than group presentations, the basic course is on the right track. Yet, a sizeable number of faculty indicated that group presentations are also very common. Some hybrid and public speaking courses do teach students to give group presentations. However, there is room for improvement in teaching students how to more effectively construct and implement small group speaking opportunities. Basic course directors or speech centers may want to explore ways to train faculty across the university how to help their students with these kinds of group presentations.

Lastly, this study revealed that faculty are interested in obtaining training that is specific to their needs. If communication faculty want to enhance effective speaking skills across the university, then getting out to other departments and doing a "needs" or "interest" assessment may be the first task that clarifies the next step in this process. This study showed that faculty wanted training on those topics we regularly teach in our basic courses: powerful language and visual aids, as well as general nonverbal behaviors as well as dynamism, fluency, and confidence while speaking. These skills can be taught by communication faculty, graduate students, or those who run Speech Centers. We believe that faculty are best able to train other faculty, and will have more credibility and can best explain the nature of communication. However, faculty training by other qualified individuals, such as speech center coordinators or graduate students in communication is still a viable option.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The first study assessed the number and nature of presentations students typically encounter in their time at the university. The second study assessed the kinds of presentations they most likely encounter on the job. Therefore, with the combination of the two studies, we can assess whether the kinds of training students are getting at the university parallel the kinds of presentations they encounter on the job. Lastly, the second study also assessed the presentation skills training of faculty, whether faculty felt adequately prepared to teach their students how to give effective presentations in their discipline, and topics in which they would like training.

These data reveal that most of the training students receive in presentation skills is from their own faculty in their department. And yet, most faculty indicated they had no formal training in "effective presentations" and have picked it up on their own. Surprisingly, most of the faculty feel they are adequately prepared to teach presentation skills to their students. Yet, when we look to the Communication literature, we find that the techniques for training effective speakers are not being implemented in these courses. For example, Levasseur, Dean, and Pfaff (2004) found that experts in advanced presentations indicate that numerous varied speeches combined with individualized speech critiques helps students identify their areas of strength and weakness. Instructors' constructive comments help identify means by which students can improve their speaking skills. However, skill advancement alone may not be the most effective. Teaching skills along with rhetorical theory may best enhance student learning. That is, teaching

rhetorical processes is important for improving the construction and delivery of effective presentations.

For those students who elect to take the Public Speaking basic course may be better prepared for the kinds of speeches they are likely to encounter in their jobs. Basic courses typically require informative and persuasive speeches, which parallel the top two forms of presentations in career-related jobs. In public speaking courses, most students are required to give individual speeches. Individual presentations also are common on the job.

In upper division courses, however, students typically encounter group presentations. The major problem identified in this study is that these group presentations and feedback are provided by faculty who have little to no training themselves in presentation skills. Given the prevalence of group presentations in many discipline's jobs, it is good that students are getting exposure to them. However, they have never been trained to give effective group presentations, suggesting that they may not be receiving the most effective training, practice, and feedback in these upper division courses.

Implications

Yoder's (1999) "speech modules" restructuring for the basic course may be one way to address this situation. Currently, most students take the basic course as freshmen, when they are often undecided in their life goals (Yoder, 1999). Therefore they may not see the value of basic course skills (Fazey & Fazey; 2001). If the basic course were broken into three one-unit courses (interpersonal/interviewing, public speaking, and group

decision making) then students could take these one-unit courses alongside of their major courses. They can be advised into the units by their major advisors, at times that parallel projects and assignments in their discipline that utilize these skills. Therefore, students would be able to receive the training by communication professionals when they are most likely to need and recognize the value of these skills in their major. One additional facet of Yoder's (1999) recreated structure is that it is more cost efficient that the traditional basic course. Yet, this is just one possible option for dealing with the lack of presentations skills across the curriculum. As a community of teachers and scholars, communication professionals are able to assess and recommend options at their university that make the most sense and serve the needs of the students and faculty alike.

These two studies' results indicate that the basic course is a good foundation for providing students with the information and skills they will need in their future careers. What is missing, however, is the more systematic or programmatic cultivation of presentation skills that will enable students to excel in their presentations (Porrovecchio, 2005). This study identified areas of training for faculty in presentation skills that Communication faculty, Faculty Development Centers, and Speech Centers can use to develop and build training "modules" for faculty so that they are more prepared to do their job. Although these data pertain to one university, we suspect that the data may be generalizeable to many universities and colleges, and therefore the recommendations relevant as well.

Improving oral communication skills should extend beyond a single course or discipline; indeed, oral com-

munication is a day-to-day experience useful for students' everyday life. Although requiring a course to help achieve a competency (i.e., course-based model) is a good start, there is only so much that students can learn and improve upon in one class. There should be follow-up opportunities for students to revise, reinforce, expand, and practice their presentation skills; they can be formal or informal, curricular or extra-curricular. The results of this university-wide portfolio assessment project and subsequent faculty survey indicate that more training and *required* presentations (whether the presentation is given to their classmates or out in their communities or workplaces) might provide more opportunities for students to improve their presentation skills.

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